



Department of Justice

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HOGSETT ANNOUNCES FEDERAL CHARGES IN CONNECTION WITH SHOOTING OF IMPD OFFICER

U.S. Attorney says focus is on protecting law enforcement and prosecuting illegal gun trade

PRESS RELEASE

INDIANAPOLIS – Early last year, in reaction to the alarming increase in the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty, Joseph H. Hogsett, the United States Attorney, announced the creation of a Violent Crime Initiative (VCI) aimed at protecting law enforcement officers and reducing violent, gun-related crime throughout Hoosier communities.

Tragically, in January 2011, Indianapolis lost Officer David Moore to a gunman who was also a convicted felon. In July 2011, Terre Haute Police Officer Brent Long was gunned down by an illegally armed felon who later took his own life.

In the case of Officer Long's death, state law did not provide an effective path of prosecution against those who were collaterally involved. In response, the U.S. Attorney's Office opened a federal investigation. Seven people who might otherwise have walked away from the tragedy were charged with various federal offenses, including providing false statements to law enforcement and illegally providing the firearm used in the shooting. All pleaded guilty. All have been sentenced or are scheduled to be sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

Today, Hogsett reported more results in this ongoing effort to protect law enforcement. Joined by federal and Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officers, Hogsett announced that Tarus E. Blackburn, Jr., age 23, of Indianapolis, has been charged with making a material false statement in the acquisition of a firearm, a criminal act commonly known as making a "straw purchase." The criminal complaint indicates that the weapon allegedly purchased by Blackburn was provided to an individual who, less than two months later in December 2011, used the weapon to shoot IMPD Officer Dwayne Runnels.

"This is National Police Week, a time in which we pause as a country to recognize the service and sacrifice of those who put their lives on the line every day to protect and serve,"

Hogsett said. "Today's announcement affirms our office's commitment to help keep these men and women safe through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of anyone who is in any way guilty of contributing to the illegal trade of firearms in Indianapolis."

The complaint alleges that in October 2011, Blackburn purchased a Smith & Wesson .40 caliber firearm, falsely stating in the required paperwork that he was purchasing the weapon for himself. The documentation provides a specific warning that a person is in violation of the law if they are purchasing the firearm on behalf of another person.

The criminal complaint further alleges that Blackburn's purchase of the weapon was actually on behalf of another individual ("D.M."). Media reports indicate that two months later on December 12, 2011, D.M. used that very weapon to shoot IMPD Officer Dwayne Runnels after Officer Runnels performed a traffic stop on the vehicle D.M. was driving. In the ensuing altercation, D.M. was killed by return fire. Officer Runnels was hospitalized, and has since recovered from injuries received during the shooting incident.

The U.S. Attorney's Office worked to launch an investigation into how D.M., widely reported by the media to be a convicted felon, had come to illegally possess the firearm. The complaint alleges that federal and local agents successfully traced the firearm that was found in the shooter's hand back to the original point of sale located on Pendleton Pike in Indianapolis, where records indicated that Blackburn had purchased the weapon in October 2011.

The complaint charges that after being interviewed by law enforcement and questioned as to how a weapon he purchased had come to be used in the December 2011 shooting, Blackburn allegedly told law enforcement that he had sold the gun to D.M. shortly after purchasing it, despite knowing that the criminal history of the individual receiving it included felony convictions.

This prosecution was the result of a collaborative investigation which included significant assistance from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, as well as IMPD.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Cynthia J. Ridgeway, who is prosecuting the case for the government, Blackburn faces a maximum of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000.00 fine. An initial hearing is scheduled for today at 1:30pm before U.S. Magistrate Judge Kennard Foster.

A criminal complaint is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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